

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SOE-01 AID-05 CEA-01 CIAE-00

COME-00 DODE-00 EB-08 DOE-12 H-01 INR-07 INT-05

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 OMB-01 PM-05 USIA-06 OES-07

SP-02 SS-15 STR-05 TRSE-00 ACDA-12 /126 W

-----113722 211014Z /13

R 210810Z DEC 77

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8828

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMCONSUL UDORN

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 1667

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1, 4 DIMPTD

TAGS: ENRG EALR PBOR ETRN LA VM TH

SUBJECT: FEUL TRANSITS ROUTE 9 FROM VIETNAM TO SAVANNAKHET

REF: A VIENTIANE 1622, B VIENTIANE 1227

1. SHELL OFFICIALS IN LAOS TOLD US DECEMBER 13 THAT LAO AUTHORITIES HAVE ASKED THEM TO INSPECT AN OIL BARGE FOR SERVICEABILITY. THE LAO INFORMED THEM THAT THE LPDR WOULD SOON USE THE BARGE TO BEGIN TRANSPORTING A LARGE SUPPLY OF AVIATION FUEL (T-1) FROM SAVANNAKHET TO VIENTIANE.

2. THE LAO SAID THAT THE FUEL REACHED SAVANNAKHET FROM VIETNAM VIA ROUTE 9. THEY SAID IT WAS PART OF LARGE ORDER FOR T-1 PLACED BY THE LAO AT THE TIME OF THE THAI EMBARGO ON LPDR-BOUND FUEL TRANSITING THAILAND.

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3. A SHELL OFFICIAL TOLD US DECEMBER 20 THAT THE FUEL, AMOUNTING TO 700,000 LITERS, HAD ARRIVED IN SAVANNAKHET BUT THAT IT WAS BEING HELD THERE BECAUSE THE BARGE TO TRANSPORT THE FUEL TO VIENTIANE WAS IN NEED OF REPAIRS AND BECAUSE SHELL STORAGE FACILITIES IN THE VIENTIANE AREA NEEDED TO BE CLEANED.

4. THE VIETNAMESE CHARGE TOLD THE INDONESIAN CHARGE IN EARLY DECEMBER THAT FOUR DAYS WERE REQUIRED TO TRAVEL FROM DA NANG TO SAVANNAKHET VIA ROUTE 9. HE ALSO SAID THAT THE ROAD COULD ACCOMMODATE TRUCKS OF UP TO FIVE OR SIX TONS IN THE DRY SEASON. (THE VIETNAMESE AND THE POLES, WHOSE AID COMES IN BY ROUTE 9, HAVE SAID THAT THE ROAD WAS STILL SUBJECT TO WASHOUTS IN THE RAINY SEASON). SHELL OFFICIALS TOLD US THAT THE LAO AND VIETNAMESE HAVE TANKER TRUCKS OF CHINESE MANUFACTURE CAPABLE OF CARRYING FOUR TONS.

5. COMMENT: THE SHIPMENT OF 700,000 LITERS OF FUEL FROM VIETNAM TO LAOS VIA ROUTE 9, UNDERTAKEN IN RESPONSE TO AN EMERGENCY FUEL SHORTAGE RESULTING FROM THE THAI EMBARGO, MAY INAUGURATE A NEW ROUTE FOR FUEL SUPPLY FROM VIETNAM. AT THIS POINT, THE ROUTE MUST BE CONSIDERED A BACKUP TO THE SYSTEM OF FUEL SUPPLY THOROUGH THAILAND, THOUGH WITH THE IMPROVEMENT OF ROUTE 9 BY THE EMPLACEMENT OF \$1.2 MILLION WORTH OF SWEDISH AID BAILEY BRIDGES AND WITH THE REPORTED PRESENCE OF VIETNAMESE ROAD CONSTRUCTION CREWS, THE SYSTEM COULD BECOME AN IMPORTANT SECONDARY ROUTE OF SUPPLY, ESPECIALLY FOR CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN LAOS.

6. REF A REPORTED THE LPDR PLANS TO INCREASE THE FUEL
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STORAGE CAPACITY AT SENO IN SAVANNAKHET PROVINCE. SHELL OFFICIALS TOLD US DECEMBER 20 THAT THE LPDR HAS IMPROVED DEFENSES OF A SHELL OWNED STORAGE FACILITY IN SAVANNAKHET THAT WAS ATTACKED BY RESISTANCE ELEMENTS EARLIER IN THE YEAR. THIS ACTIVITY SUGGESTS THAT THE LPDR MAY BE DEVELOPING A SEPARATE FUEL SUPPLY AND STORAGE SYSTEM FOR SOUTHERN LAOS SO AS TO REDUCE RELIANCE ON THE VULNERABLE, THAI-DEPENDENT CHOKEPOINT OF VIENTIANE, WHICH CURRENTLY SERVICES APPROXIMATELY 75 PERCENT OF THE LPDR'S FUEL NEEDS (REF B).
ROBERTS

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